

THE
L I F E
O F
JAMES AITKEN,
COMMONLY CALLED
JOHN the PAINTER,
A N
I N C E N D I A R Y,

WHO WAS TRIED AT THE
CASTLE of WINCHESTER,

On THURSDAY the 7th Day of MARCH, 1777,

And Convicted of setting FIRE to his
MAJESTY'S DOCK-YARD, at PORTSMOUTH,
Exhibiting a detail of FACTS of the utmost Importance
to GREAT BRITAIN.

The Whole faithfully taken down from the Convict's own Mouth, on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, preceding his Execution.

Published by Authority.

WINTON, PRINTED BY J. WILKES,
SOLD BY S. CROWDER, G. ROBINSON, AND R. BALDWIN,
PATER-NOSTER ROW, AND T. EVANS IN THE STRAND.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.



T O
THE PEOPLE OF GREAT-BRITAIN
THIS CONFESSION
IS MOST HUMBLY OFFERED,
IN DETESTATION
OF MY ENORMOUS CRIMES,
PARTICULARLY AGAINST
HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT,
AND IN HOPES
OF RECEIVING PRESENT AND FUTURE
FORGIVENESS.

JOHN AITKEN.

*Winchester-Goal, 10th of
March, 1777.*

THE PEOPLE OF GREAT-BRITAIN

THIS COMMISSION

IS MOST HUMBLY OFFERED

IN DETAIL TWO

OF THE ENORMOUS CHARGES

PAID TO THE GOVERNMENT

AND IN HONOR

OF RECEIVING PRESENT AND FUTURE

FOR CIVIL SERVICE

JOHN ALLEN

Printed by W. & A. G. Smith, 17, St. Paul's Churchyard, London, E.C.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following sheets having been put into the hands of the Publisher, by the Keeper of *Winchester Goal*, and ordered to be printed at the request of the Convict; the public may rely on the authenticity of the facts therein related. But as spurious copies will most likely be printed in different parts of the kingdom, the public are requested to observe, that none are genuine, unless signed in the hand writing of

J. Wilkes

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following letters having been put
into the hands of the Publisher by the
Keeper of the Manuscript, and ordered to be
printed at the request of the Committee, the public
may rely on the authenticity of the facts
therein related. But as spurious copies will most
likely be printed in different parts of the king-
dom, the public are requested to observe, that
none are genuine, unless signed in the hand
writing of

W. M. G.

Whether the above reflections are founded or not, in the following instance, certain it is, that the transition before us is of the most extraordinary nature, drawn as much from the imagination and propensity of the mind, as from the hope of glory, and passion of reward.

It was suggested, a maxim, that man is a creature of two natures, the rational and the sensual, and another, that man is a creature of two passions, the love of glory and the love of ease.

THE
L I F E
OF

JAMES AITKEN.

When we seriously reflect upon the various proceedings and enterprises of man, we find him in many instances an almost incomprehensible being, delighting in schemes of the most arduous nature, and governed by whim or caprice in the conducting of them. In these cases it is that we find it impossible to prescribe limits to the strength of genius, or the progress of resolution; and the more we endeavour to baffle the incitements of passion, the more formidable oftentimes is the force we have to encounter.

Whether the above reflections are verified, or not, in the following sheets, certain it is, that the transaction before us is of the most extraordinary nature, derived as much from the inclination and propensity of the mind, as from the hope of glory, and prospect of reward. It was suggested by a mixture of enthusiasm and ambition, utterly unaccountable. An enterprise the more likely to succeed, as, in its nature, it was new and unprecedented. No event that I can recollect in history, bears so near a resemblance to the present, as RAVILLIAC'S famous assassination of the king of France. I cannot, however, but remark this material difference, that the one could only deprive a people of their sovereign, while the other threatened little less than the annihilation of both king and people, and of the greatest commercial empire in Europe.

How happy it is then for Great Britain, that so mischievous a plot has been detected; and what abundant thanks are due to that All-gracious providence, whose interposing hand directed to a timely discovery. Every man who has the welfare of his country at heart, must be stimulated with just resentment against the nefarious

farious abettors of this detestable scheme, the promoters of so abominable and pitiful an act of cowardice.

The agent of this, as well as of most other desperate undertakings, seems to have been actuated by neither fear nor remorse. Hardened by the commission of a long train of capital offences; misled by the idea of embarking in a public cause, and lured by the prospect of reward, and the ambition of becoming great, no obstacles retarded his progress; and whatever difficulties he met with in the perpetration of his villainy, he found means to evade by the subtilty and fullness of his disposition.

The same reservedness of temper was remarkable throughout his whole confinement, and attended him almost to his last moments, notwithstanding the admonitions of several persons, who exhorted him to repentance, and a confession of his crime. The terrors of death, the awfulness of eternity, and a sense of his enormous guilt, seem at last to have got the better of his stubbornness, to have awakened him to repentance, and that voluntary confession, which he hoped would be of such importance to the public,

public, as in some measure to plead for the forgiveness of his atrocious crimes.

It is here to be remarked, how extraordinary and wonderful it was, that a man of so subtil and reserved a turn of mind, should, as it were, be instantaneously prejudiced in favour of a stranger, and so much off his guard, as to make a voluntary and formal declaration of his whole proceedings! a declaration which put his life into the hands of another; and which, in fact, was the chief evidence that amounted to conviction. Herein we perceive the inconsistency of human nature, or rather the supernatural effects of providence, which in the wisdom of its dispensations has assigned the wicked to self-condemnation.

Much might be said concerning the nature of this connexion. If held to view in the dress of friendship and brotherly affection, what epithets might not be cast upon the servile hypocrite, who forfeiting the ties of honour and confidence, sports with the life of his credulous friend. But when the interest, when the safety of a nation is at stake, and when the greatest calamities are to be feared from the malevolence

lence of one man, is it not meritorious, by any means, to discover the treachery, and by a timely interposition prevent its fatal consequences? Matters of this delicacy, however, I shall leave to the determination of others; it will be sufficient for me to remark, that the subtilty, and shrewdness of the offender, bespoke him the man of ability, while his conduct in other respects betrayed him a fool.

Without making, at present, any further observations, we shall proceed to a detail of those remarkable facts, which will characterise this man's life to distant ages. And supposing the curiosity of the public to be better gratified by having the whole as related by the convict himself; great care has been taken in copying the original.

IT is with difficulty I have prevailed with myself to make this confession. The largeness of my stubborn heart will scarce suffer me to relent. And tho' I am sensible of the heinousness of my crimes, and have earnestly prayed for grace and repentance, yet I find myself so
little

little softened by it, that I fear my sins are too great to be forgiven.

I drew my first breath at Edinburgh in Scotland. My father, DAVID AITKEN, was a white-smith, which business he for many years carried on in a creditable way. I was brought up in the persuasion of a protestant dissenter; and being the only son, was treated with that paternal affection, which, by gratifying all my desires, begot in me the most stubborn and obdurate disposition.

At nine years of age I was placed in Herriot's hospital * at Edinburgh, a charitable foundation of the same kind with Christ's hospital in London; where continuing for six years, and having the advantage of a liberal education, and

* Herriot's Hospital is a magnificent structure, situated upon an eminence, on one side of the Grass Market, opposite the Castle, in Edinburgh. It was founded by George Herriot, jeweller to King James the VI. of Scotland, who left seven thousand pounds sterling, for the maintenance and education of the children of reduced merchants and tradesmen of that city. It was built upon the plan of Inigo Jones, consisting of an exact square, with piazzas all round, built with free-stone, embellished with carved-work, and adorned with towers and turrets. A statue of the founder as
large

a natural taste for drawing, I was at the age of fifteen apprenticed to an eminent painter in the city of Edinburgh.

Whether it was that my attachment to this business was so great, or that having an indulgent master, and all my desires gratified at home, that satisfied me under this seven years engagement; be that as it may, I served the whole of my apprenticeship, much to my own credit, and to the satisfaction of my master.

My leisure hours were generally employed in reading. The most favourite subjects were of the marvellous kind; such as the desperate expeditions and engagements of brave men both by sea and land. The heroes of antiquity had before made up a part of my study. The

large as life, stands in a niche over the inside of the gate. The entry is by an easy ascent through three spacious courts; the apartments for the masters and scholars are neat and commodious; the gardens are large, and well disposed in delightful walks and grottos: in a word, this Hospital has all the appearance of a royal palace. The magistrates of the city are the perpetual guardians of this noble charity, by which one hundred and thirty boys are constantly fed, clothed and educated. See Smollett's history of all nations, vol. 2. p. 118.

great

great acquisitions of Rome, Greece, and Athens, had their place in my mind; and I can't say but I felt from thence the desire of accomplishing some great atchievement.

Among modern writers, particularly on the principles of religion and politicks, Voltaire was my favourite; whose works I have read with uncommon satisfaction. Among time-serving writers, all publications of an anti-ministerial turn, which inveighed at monarchical government, were the most pleasing; particularly Dr. Price's Tract, of which I have always entertained the highest opinion.

At the expiration of my apprenticeship, having my indentures given me, I set off, with a mind thus prepared, to seek my fortune. I had before lost my father, whose sudden death prevented him from placing me in business under his own eye, as was his original intention. His circumstances were such as could not enable him to make provision for me equal to the notions I had entertained. I had very early contracted an itch for the service, and notwithstanding the affairs of my father, I had yet hopes of procuring a commission in the land forces. I applied
to

to my mother to assist in importuning my friends and relations to serve me in this particular.—But our endeavours were vain, and I saw the object of my ambition beyond my reach. I therefore, in a fit of resentment, embarked for London with all the monies I could scrape together, not doubting but I should get into some creditable employ before it was all spent.

On my arrival in the great metropolis, I applied to people in the painting way, and immediately got into employ. But business not long agreeing with my inclination, and having formed an acquaintance with some extravagant young men, by whom I was led into all manner of vice and debauchery, I soon found the last farthing of my little pittance expended. In this condition, deserted by my companions, and in a strange country, I determined to relieve myself on the highway. I accordingly provided myself with pistols, and without the least concern, or apprehension of danger, proceeded to Finchley Common. Perceiving a post chaise, I made up to it, and with a discharge of one of my pistols, demanded them to stop. My success in the first attack, tempted me to proceed, so that before midnight came on, I had robbed several carriages
and

and single horsemen, and upon the whole had collected a considerable booty.

I returned to London with great satisfaction of heart, and finding out my old companions, informed them I had just received a large sum of money. They congratulated me upon my good fortune, and readily took me again into their party. I observed myself advertised, and an exact description of my person and dress in all the papers. It was therefore my first care to change my clothes, and make every alteration in my person I could possibly devise; and it was my fortune to escape undiscovered.

This supply of cash was too easily procured to be husbanded with prudence. My own excess and that of my companions, soon reduced me to the last shilling; after which, highway robberies, private thefts, and shop-lifting, was my common employment; 'till at length dreading the consequences of a detection, or of being betrayed by some of my companions, I determined to seize the first opportunity of leaving the kingdom.

I had before made myself pretty conversant in the customs and government of most nations, but
was

was at a loss which to make choice of for my adventure. Among the rest, America presented itself to my imagination, and I readily believed it would turn out most to my advantage. It also occurred to me, that I might easily procure a passage, by entering into the service of some gentleman, merchant, or captain, going there.

With this view, I threw myself as much as possible in the way of people trading to those colonies, and it was not long before the desired opportunity presented itself. Hearing of a vessel bound to America, I made application to the master, captain John Robertson, who took me into his service; but not having money to provide myself with such things as were necessary for the voyage; I indented myself to him till such time as I should pay him twenty-four pounds Virginia money, and then was to have my full liberty.

Soon after my arrival in Virginia, captain Robertson having taken in a freight for England, consigned me over to one Mr. Graham of James Town, to whom I was either to pay the twenty-four pounds, or serve it out in labour.

bour: But as it was never my intention to remain longer with the captain than suited my conveniency, I immediately after his departure quitted the service of Mr. Graham, and travelled up the country through Maryland, till I arrived at Philadelphia. From thence I went to Amboy, and got employment in the painting business; but hearing there was better encouragement at New York, I made the best of my way to that city, where I received better wages, and remained very well satisfied for a considerable time.

Upon hearing of the riots at Boston, the restlessness of my disposition would not suffer me to remain any longer at New York; and meeting with a companion whose curiosity was equally excited with my own, we agreed to set out together for that place; and I cannot deny being very active in those riots, particularly in sinking the tea, and insulting the friends of government, in which I did not escape the notice of many principal persons among the Americans.

When I heard of the armaments raising in Great Britain against America, and the expectation of a British fleet at Boston, I thought it advisable to leave the place, therefore took the opportunity

portunity of a vessel, and went to North Carolina, where meeting with another vessel bound to England, I got leave to work my passage home, and arrived at Liverpool in May 1775.

As soon as I had landed, having no money, I enlisted into a recruiting party, and received twenty-six shillings, with which, in a few days I deserted, intending to go to Shrewsbury. In my way between Warrington and Holmes Chapel in Lancashire, I broke into a little shop which I observed by the road-side, and stole several handkerchiefs, some stockings, and about twenty shillings in money. By the time I left Shrewsbury, my money was nearly exhausted, upon which I broke into a shop, and robbed it of a quantity of half-pence and about five shillings in silver, and I made off in the night for Birmingham.

Soon after I arrived at Birmingham, I applied to a painter of that place for employment, and promised to go the next day to work; but not finding it likely to agree with my inclination, having done nothing at it for a long time, I never called afterwards. I purchased a pistol and several pick-locks, intending to follow a more profitable business, and after pilfering a number of

shops, which I made excuses to go into, I left Birmingham and took the road to Coventry. In my way to that city I broke open a house in a little town a few miles from it, I believe it was called Meriden, where I stole a great quantity of handkerchiefs, six-pence in silver, and some half-pence, with which before day-light I reached Coventry.

On my arrival at Coventry, I met with another recruiting party, into which I also enlisted. I received half a guinea earnest, with which I absconded about three o'clock in the morning, leaving my comrades asleep in bed. I went to a hedge a little way out of the town, where I had secreted the handkerchiefs, and set off with them on my way towards London; and being soon afterwards overtaken by a stage, I prevailed with the coachman to give me a lift to Daventry. From hence I walked to St. Albans, and in my way robbed one man on horseback of seven shillings and ten-pence, and another on foot of three shillings. From St. Albans I took the stage to London for fear of being pursued; and as soon as I arrived, I went to a pawn-broker and sold the handkerchiefs, &c. for about one fourth of their value.

I con-

I continued in London almost four months, where I got into connexion with some women of the town, which led me to commit a number of street robberies for my support. I also broke open a house at Kensington, and committed several robberies upon the outskirts of London.

In March 1776, I went to Cambridge, being fearful of staying in London any longer, and having a desire to see that university. In my way I robbed three people I met with on foot, and just before I reached Cambridge I stopped a chaise, but there being no person in it, I robbed the driver of a shilling, which I afterwards found to be a brass one. I had not been at Cambridge long, before the want of money obliged me to break open a shop, out of which I stole twenty-seven shillings in silver, and about three shillings in half-pence. From Cambridge I made a circle round the northern part of England, and robbed as I went to support myself. In my way back to London, I stopped at Colchester, and soon afterwards enlisted into the 13th regiment of foot, in which I remained some time, supposing the change of cloaths would prevent my being apprehended for some or other of the innumerable robberies I had committed.

I deserted from this regiment in August 1776, and made the best of my way to London, from thence to Chichester, Portsmouth and Southampton, between all which places I committed several robberies on the highway. From Southampton I went to Romsey, where I broke open the house of one Mr. Newman, a glazier, and stole two diamonds used to cut glass, and several other things. With these I made the best of my way through Winchester to Basingstoke, intending to return to London. Going over a down near Basingstoke, I saw a girl watching some sheep, upon whom, with threats and imprecations, I committed a rape, to my shame be it said!

After spending about twelve months in the commission of these daring felonies, one or other of which was perpetrated in almost every county in this kingdom, and for which I had always the fortune to pass with impunity; I left Basingstoke and directed my steps towards Oxford, which city I had never before seen. One night in conversation, concerning the American war, the importance of his majesty's fleet and dock yards was the favourite argument; and it was with satisfaction I heard every one agree, that the safety, the welfare, and even the existence of this nation depended on them. I endeavoured
to

to keep the conversation up as much as possible; - and the more it was canvassed, the more evident was the truth of the former conclusion.

It is amazing with what force this conversation kept possession of my mind. I believe it never left me afterwards. In the night I had a thousand ideas, and all tended to shew how important would be the event in favour of America, provided these dock yards and shipping could be destroyed. The more I considered it, the more plausible was the undertaking, and the more eager I found myself to become the instrument of it.

I spent two days in the contemplation of this malicious design, and promised myself immortal honour in the accomplishment of it. I beheld it in the light of a truly heroic enterprise, such as never would have been equalled to the end of time. I was persuaded it would entitle me to the first rank in America; and flattered myself with the ambition of becoming the admiration of the world!

With these flattering prospects I set off for Portsmouth, to inform myself of the particular situation, as also of the materials and stores with

which these magazines were composed. I was well aware, that the collecting satisfactory information would be a work of time. I therefore, soon after my arrival, entered into the employ of Mr. Golding, a painter, at Titchfield, with a design to prevent suspicion of my real business. I made enquiry, as it were by accident, concerning the strictness of the guard, and the admission of strangers into the dock yard. I was answered fully to my satisfaction. I frequently attended the yard, acquainted myself with every part of it, and learnt the contents of near all the storehouses, and so particularly, that I formed a very accurate plan of it. I took account of all the ships of war in the harbour, their force, and number of men. I also took a plan of the fortifications unnoticed by the centinels, the number of guns mounted on them, and their weight of metal. I did not omit remarking the carelessness of the watch, and the security in which I found all orders of men in their different departments; and this observation occurred to me so strong, that it removed all apprehensions of difficulty in carrying my design into execution.

From hence I went to Plymouth, where I found things much in the same situation. I acquainted

acquainted myself with every information that was necessary for my business. I paid strict attention to the fortifications, the ships of war, and the greatness of their force. I placed myself in the way of all business, learnt the particulars of every thing that was going forward, and examined the contents of every store-house, without raising the least suspicion, or being questioned by any one.

My next care was to visit Chatham, with the same circumspect attention, and in which I conducted myself with the same success. From hence I went to the yards at Woolwich and Deptford, and in both places informed myself of every thing material; for though they are much inferior to the foregoing, yet I thought them of too much consequence to escape me.

Having spared no labour in perfecting this general survey, I formed a design of going over to America, to lay my plans and observations before the Congress, as well as to procure their sanction to the undertaking. But I was not aware of the difficulty of getting a passage; I had recourse to every method, and consulted a number of schemes, but all combined to shew the impossibility of the attempt, which at best was very hazardous.

zardous. The great expectations therefore, that I had formed of prosperity, began to disappear, and all the labour and fatigue I had undergone in collecting my information, was likely to go unrewarded, and I sat down in a fit of disappointment and despair.

But the devil is seldom long in furnishing new means of carrying on any wicked negotiation. The recollection of Mr. Silas Deane and Dr. Franklin, at Paris, speedily removed all my apprehensions, and I once more set to business with redoubled vigour. I re-examined all my plans, threw my observations into proper order, and secreted them in a private part of my cloaths, to prevent an accidental discovery; and having made every other necessary preparation for my departure, I made the best of my way to Canterbury and Dover.

When at Dover, I was under some anxiety, concerning the taking a passage, lest any accident or suspicion should arise, so as to discover my real business. In these, and such like perplexing thoughts I spent almost two days, when to remove the danger and dread of being searched, I hired a small sailing boat to take me over. I embarked with only two hands, and in less than nine
hours

hours landed at Calais, without any further difficulty. I now found myself in a country with which I was utterly unacquainted; but having formerly had a tolerable knowledge of French, I made my way pretty readily and expeditiously to Paris, sometimes taking the advantage of a carriage, and sometimes walking on foot.

My first enquiry at Paris, was to find out the lodgings of Mr. Silas Deane. I called upon him at two different times, but did not meet with him at home. I at last saw him on the *Pont Neuf* in Paris, where I addressed him, and requested a private interview, having some information to communicate of great importance to America. He treated me at first with great caution and indifference, and would scarce hear what I had to say; but finding my solicitations very earnest, he desired I would meet him the next morning at his lodgings.

I called on him at the time appointed, and was conducted into an elegant apartment, where he was waiting for me. To make myself of as much consequence as possible, and to appear a little above the common class, I informed him that I had a plantation in America, which I feared would be laid waste by the British army.
That

That I wanted to go into America on that account, as I would defend it to the last drop of blood. That I found it impossible to get a passage from England, without being suspected, and should be obliged to him to put me into a method of going from thence. That I was an utter enemy to Great Britain, as I understood he was, and had the interest of America so much at heart, that I would readily undertake any expedition, though ever so dangerous, in its behalf. That I was just arrived from England, where the generality of people were much divided against government; and the greatest part declared in favour of America, whose struggles against the ministry they hoped would be successful. That I had myself contrived a scheme, which, if properly carried into execution, would effectually destroy the power of the ministry, and throw the kingdom into the greatest confusion, if not into the hands of America.

He expressed great surprise at my conversation, and desired me to give him an explanation of my meaning. I answered, that it was generally allowed, that the dock yards and shipping belonging to Great Britain, were the only advantages they had over America; and that their dependence

JAMES AITKEN.

dence upon them, lulled the people into the greatest carelessness and security. That I had it in my power, by an invention of my own, effectually to destroy all the dock yards, and, I believed, the greatest part of the shipping, without the assistance of any other man, or even of being suspected by the enemy.

I then produced the plans I had taken of the several yards, fortifications, &c. and informed him of the knowledge I had acquired of every particular storehouse and magazine in the different docks, the free access which strangers of all kinds had into them, and the facility with which the whole might be set on fire, if attempted by an industrious active person. That I should have no objection to undertake it myself, provided I was assured of being countenanced by America, and properly rewarded: but if I failed in the attempt, I would not accept of any reward.

Mr. Deane replied, that he could not help looking upon it as an enterprise bordering upon madness, and started a number of difficulties which he supposed had escaped me, and which he was too well assured would attend such a business, were it ever so well managed.

That

That without the greatest circumspection, perseverance, and most profound secrecy, a discovery was inevitable. That he thought it impossible to effect the scheme in the day time, and to be shut in for a whole night, was for many reasons very dangerous, unless it was possible to scale the walls. That he apprehended the fire would make its appearance before I could have time to escape; and the consequences of a detection would be fatal. For should it come out that America was privy to it, he feared it would be of as much injury to the cause, as the entire accomplishment of it would be serviceable. He concluded with desiring me to attend at the same hour in the morning, to leave the drawings and observations, for his consideration in the meantime, and on no account to drop a hint of my business at Paris, or my knowledge of him, or even to speak a word concerning the affairs of America.

I now began to promise myself that good fortune of which, at my first setting off in life, I was disappointed. I retired to my lodgings, and spent the night in contemplating the success my scheme was likely to meet with, in the approbation of Mr. Deane, and determined to improve every opportunity of gaining the good opinion of a man, whose friendship was so essential to my prosperity.

At

At the hour appointed, I made a second visit to Mr. Deane, who told me he had well considered the matter, and could not help still looking upon it as a very desperate scheme; but notwithstanding, if I was clear in my own opinion that it would be attended with success, and had resolution enough to overcome the almost insurmountable difficulties attending it, I might rely upon every assistance he could give me; but that, for his own part, he concluded it was impracticable. I replied, that it was very natural for him to be of that opinion, who was unacquainted with the management of dock yards, and knew nothing of my method of communicating the fire. That I had invented a portable machine, of such dimensions as to carry in my pocket, and which when charged with combustible matter and lighted, was so contrived as not to emit any rays of light; that I could place them in as many different storehouses or vessels as I pleased, without the least difficulty; and that by the help of a certain composition, I could keep them burning any given number of hours, so as to make my escape sixty or seventy miles from the place, before the fire should break out, or be discovered. That a large quantity of these machines might be made at a small expence, as they consisted only of such materials as were very cheap,

THE LIFE OF

cheap, and to be met with almost every where. That the only difficulty would be in procuring an ingenious fellow to make them, as much depended on the compactness and nicety of the workmanship.

This information was very strictly attended to, and seemed to have great weight with Mr. Deane, who requested me to give a description of the machine in the best manner I could, which I did, by the following plan and explanation, much to his satisfaction.



a a Represents a tin case, made in a long square form, well soldered together, the sides nearly closing at the top, where they fall towards each other

other in a shelving direction. *bb* A small wooden box, filled with combustible matter, and fitted so exactly to the case, as to have no visible separation. *cc* Shews a lighted candle, with its end fixed in the box of combustible matter, by means of a hole made through its top for that purpose, and through which the candle, when burnt below the surface of the box, communicates itself to the combustibles. *dd* Represents a plate of tin, fixed near the top of the case, and punched full of very fine holes, so as to admit particles of air sufficient to keep the candle burning, without being so large, as to discover the light. *ee* Shews the extremity of the wooden box, which having no bottom, is set upon any materials, such as hemp, pitch, tar, wood, &c. intended to be set on fire.

Mr. Deane expressed his approbation of this contrivance, by saying, that he now believed the scheme was practicable. He asked me how much money I should expect, in order to make an attempt at Portsmouth, which being a place of the first consequence, ought to be the first object. I replied, that little or no money would be wanting at present; that if I had a sufficiency to carry me into England, I should desire nothing more 'till I had earned it. He desired to know, in case I

succeeded, what kind of reward I should expect. I told him that I had always an inclination to go into the army, and therefore expected a commission in the American service; but as for any thing further, I should leave that to him, who I doubted not would see me rewarded in proportion to my merit.

He paid some encomiums upon the moderation of my demands; but enjoined the strictest caution and secrecy. He said that human affairs were all uncertain, and that though every thing seemed to conspire to ensure success, yet, by one inadvertent step, perhaps the whole undertaking may be frustrated. That as I appeared to have taken great pains hitherto in raising this scheme to maturity, he hoped no endeavour would be wanting in bringing it to an issue. That he had a friend in London, to whom he should communicate the secret, and would recommend me to his esteem, and direct him to advance such sums as I should in this business have occasion for. That he would give me a direction to him, but that I should not call upon him till I had effected the business at Portsmouth, after which I should immediately make the best of my way to London, and he would secrete me till the rumour of the fire was abated, and the danger of suspicion at an end. That then I should proceed to Plymouth, and to the

the other places I had before visited, and with that care and deliberate sagacity which so great an enterprise required, endeavour to complete a total destruction. When this was effected, I should take the first vessel, and return to France, where I should meet with every reward which the greatness of my services would entitle me to expect.

The earnestness with which Mr. Deane delivered these admonitions, made a very deep impression. If I had before been disaffected to the cause, I should now have applied myself to it with double ardour. I assured him that I needed no precautions, that I had already undergone more perils in arriving at my information, than would attend the burning of a whole kingdom. That I thought no time should be lost in making my departure, and therefore, with his leave, would set off immediately. He replied, that it was not impossible but some objections or difficulties may arise in my going out of that kingdom, which would both retard my journey, and cause my business to be enquired into. To prevent this, he would put me in a way to procure a pass from under the hand of the king of France, which would greatly facilitate my journey, and not detain me above two days longer. He put about three pounds English money into my hand, and a direction to his friend in London, which, he said,

would answer all demands for cash, and be better than carrying much specie about me.

So soon as the pass was procured, I set off very well satisfied for Calais, where I found it of great service. I got into a vessel, and had a very short passage to Dover, which place I immediately left, and took the road to Canterbury. In this city I thought it prudent to prepare my apparatus for the fire, which being at a great distance from Portsmouth, would give no room for suspicion. I applied to a brazier to procure the tin case; but finding it impossible to make him understand my directions, I had recourse to his apprentice, who being more tractable, soon completed the job. I then got a little box made exactly to fit the bottom of the case, and purchased a quantity of inflammable articles to charge it with. I also ordered at another shop in this city, two more instruments of the same kind; but finding them so long in hand, and thinking it improper to remain many days in one place for fear of being observed, I set off for Chatham, after calling for them once.

Here I spent two days, in making some fresh observations on the shipping and dock-yard, after which, I set out for London, in order to take the road for Portsmouth. When in London, I thought it advisable to provide myself with such further
arti-

articles, as were likely to be wanted in the perpetration of this infernal business. I purchased a pair of screw-barrel pistols, resolving, if any man should detect or molest me, to kill him on the spot. I also procured a pistol-tinder-box, a quantity of tinder, a gallon of the spirits of turpentine, and a quantity of nitre. These I packed up in the most careful manner, and the next day began my journey.

I arrived at Portsmouth on Thursday evening the 5th of December, 1776, and immediately began to lay down a plan of operations. I concluded, that in so large and populous a place, a number of fire-engines were most probably kept, and, that on the first alarm, they would fly to the assistance of the dock, and perhaps extinguish the fire, before any considerable damage could be done. To prevent this, I thought it would be necessary to set the town on fire at the same time in two different parts, imagining that the surprise and consternation which it would naturally occasion, would prevent people from giving assistance to either, 'till the flames had made such progress as not to be got under.

To effect this mischievous resolution, I determined not to go to bed that night, but to walk the town over, and by the assistance of the moon,

which shone very bright, to find out such houses as were built principally of timber, and in situations likely to do the most damage. I spared no labour in this search, and was careful to determine on such houses as had no party walls to repel the flames. In the morning I applied at two of these houses for lodgings, one of which was occupied by Mrs. Boxell. I agreed with her for them, and desired to see my apartment, which she complied with. I appeared very well satisfied with it, as indeed it would have answered my purpose extremely well. I left my bundle with her, and said I should return in the evening. From hence I went to a public house, refreshed myself, and engaged also for a bed. My next care was to visit the dock yard, to wait an opportunity for placing the combustibles; and having fixed upon such a situation as was most likely to answer my end, I returned to my lodgings for the tin case, the box of inflammable materials, spirits of turpentine, tinder-box, &c. with which I returned about two o'clock into the dock yard. My first intention was to set fire to the hemp-house, in which I secreted myself behind a large mow or bundle of hemp, supposing there was no danger of being discovered, although a number of men were employed in different parts of the building. I found this
mow

mow of hemp so hard and consolidated, that I was afraid when the fire came to it, that it would not burn; and it was with great difficulty that I could loosen it. I pulled off my coat with a resolution of opening a cavity in its side, in which I intended to place the machine; but this not being practicable, I got together a quantity of hemp that lay about, and having made a pile against the mow, I placed the machine upon it, but first sprinkled a quantity of spirits of turpentine upon the top of the pile, and covered the whole over with some fresh hemp. In this situation I left the machine, intending to go in about two hours afterwards to set it on fire. But lest this should not take proper effect, or be extinguished before it could communicate itself to other parts of the yard, I thought it would be more effectual to set fire to some other store-house also. In walking round the yard, I observed the rope-house open, into which I went, and having gone all over it, up stairs and down, I pitched upon a room containing a parcel of ropes and some hemp, which I thought a very proper place to set on fire. I went away, and returned with two quarts of the spirits of turpentine, some gunpowder, and some touch-paper which I had previously made. I drew the cork from one of the bottles, and having prepared a train of hemp soaked in the spirits,

I filled the neck of the bottle therewith, which I placed among the ropes, and covered it over with a quantity of refuse hemp, which I found laying about. I placed the bottle upon its side, and put the end of the train of hemp into a paper of dry gunpowder, and having covered the whole lightly over with hemp, I sprinkled the remaining spirits of turpentine upon the whole. I now pulled out my pistol tinder-box, and endeavoured to strike a light, in order to set it on fire; but the tinder being either damp, or badly burnt, would not take fire. The attention with which I was endeavouring to light my match, prevented me from observing the time, and therefore, when I had found it impossible to strike a light, and was preparing to go to my lodgings, I found myself locked into the house. I was a little uneasy upon this occasion, for fear of raising suspicion, particularly as I should be obliged to appear again to light the matches, which I had now failed in. I went from one end of the building to the other, which was of a prodigious length, and tried every door I could find; but all was fast. I went up stairs very gently for fear of being heard, intending to make my escape from one of the windows; but this I also found impossible. I then went back to the door at which I came in, and knocked for a considerable time. At last a lad came up, and asked who was there?

I told

JAMES AITKEN.

47

I told him I was a friend, and had come into the dock-yard out of curiosity, having never been at Portsmouth before, and while I went up stairs to see this great building, somebody had locked up the doors, I therefore begged he would let me out. He went away to call some other person, who directed me to a certain door in the building, at which he said I might let myself out. In order to allay their suspicion, I appeared to be very ignorant in every respect, and asked them a number of simple questions, for I very much expected to be taken into custody.

I went to a public house in a back street, to refresh myself, and from thence to my lodgings at Mrs. Boxell's. I went to bed, and slept till about five o'clock in the morning of Saturday the 7th of December, when I struck a light, and got up. My first business was to mix up proper combustibles to set that house on fire, and the public house I had before taken lodgings at. The preparation I had made consisted of gunpowder, rosin, turpentine, nitre, &c. which I intended to have placed under the beds, to have locked up the doors, and carried the keys away in my pocket, to prevent a discovery before the bedding had taken fire. I also made a quantity of fresh tinder out of an old shirt I had torn up for that purpose, the smoke of which, attended
with

with the sulphurous smell occasioned by the inflammable articles, brought up Mrs. Boxell, who in a violent passion burst open the door, asked me whether I was setting the room on fire, and insisted upon my leaving her house, saying, she was sure I could have no good design. Finding her in earnest, I thought it most prudent to quit her lodgings without entering into further dispute, which could only tend to injure my business; so I took my bundle, and walked almost two hours round Portsmouth Common, to seek for another lodging. Observing a house in North-street, which seemed likely to answer my purpose, I went in and agreed for a lodging, saying I was going a little way out of town, but should return in the evening, in the mean while desired the woman of the house, Mrs. Cole, to take care of my bundle.

My next object was to accomplish the business in the dock yard. I went first to the hemp-house, and after waiting a safe opportunity, got into the room where I had left the materials, struck a light with my pistol tinder-box, and lighted the candle which I had before placed in the tin case under the hemp. I since find that this machine did not take effect, owing, as I imagine, to its being covered over with too much hemp, which obstructed the air from entering the
little

little holes in the top of the machine in such quantity as was necessary to keep the candle burning; otherwise this building would have been in flames at the same time with the rope-house. Having, as I thought, effectually compleated my business here, I directed my steps towards the rope-house, and after waiting almost two hours, I took an opportunity of lighting the match that communicated to the gun-powder, which I believe took effect in about an hour and an half. The instant I had finished, I quitted the dock yard, intending to go immediately to set fire to both my lodgings; but meeting a person near the dock gates who knew me when I worked at Titchfield, during the time I was making my observations, and seeing him look at me very stedfastly, and recollecting at the same instant the affair at Mrs. Boxell's, I ran very precipitately out of town, without giving myself time to call for my bundle, dreading an information, and the consequence of being taken into custody.

When I had gone a little way out of town, I overtook a cart going from market; and in order to make more haste, and be less observed, I prevailed with the woman who drove the cart, to give me a lift, telling her I had to go to Petersfield that night, and would make her any satis-

satisfaction. She took me into the cart, and drove with great speed till we reached Kingston, where she got out to buy some pattens. Having done her business, she drove on about a mile further, when her horse getting weary, she said he wanted water, and drove to a pond at the road-side. At this instant I looked round towards Portsmouth, and saw the dock in a blaze, upon which I jumped out of the cart without saying a word, and run for near four miles on the road to Petersfield, being still under great apprehension of Mrs. Boxell's giving intelligence of me, and of being pursued.

I travelled all night without intermission, and arrived at Kingston upon Thames about eleven o'clock on Sunday morning, where I staid upwards of three hours to refresh myself. About three o'clock in the afternoon I renewed my journey, and having walked something more than two miles from Kingston, I was overtaken by a post-chaise, which drove very fast. I ordered the boy to stop, but being disregarded and laughed at by him, I sprung close up to the side of the chaise and discharged my pistol, which was loaded with shot, through the glass window. Two gentlemen were in the carriage, who appeared very much frightened, but I hope they received no damage. I was soon

JAMES AITKEN.

Soon after overtaken by a hackney stage, by which I got a lift to London.

On my arrival in London, I concluded myself out of danger. I refreshed myself at a little public house in Westminster, and then made it my business to find out Dr. Bencroft, the gentleman to whom I was directed by Mr. Deane, who lives in Downing Street, Westminster. I was taken into a parlour, and Dr. Bencroft in a few minutes came to me. I told him my name was Aetzen, that I was the person sent by Mr. Deane from Paris, to burn and destroy the dock-yards and shipping belonging to government. That I had set Portsmouth dock on fire, which was then in flames, and that Mr. Deane had directed me to apply to him, who he said he should communicate the secret to, and direct to supply me with what money I wanted, and to secrete me till suspicion was over. He appeared somewhat surprised at this information, said he knew Mr. Deane perfectly well, but had never heard from him concerning this matter, and therefore should have nothing to do with it. That at present he had company in the house, and not time to talk with me, but if I would go to the Salopian coffee-house, he would come to me in about half an hour.

About

About seven o'clock, or some little time after, Dr. Bencroft came and sat down with me. I related to him my whole conversation with Mr. Deane, my success at Portsmouth, which he would see confirmed in the papers of to-morrow, and my reliance on him for money, and such other assistance as I should want in the continuance of this scheme. After a short conversation, Dr. Bencroft told me, that though he wished Mr. Deane very well, and entertained a great friendship for him, yet he would not have to do with any of his schemes. That he lived and got his bread under this government, and must therefore be excused from meddling in this affair; nor would he encourage me in my proceedings, and desired me not to call at his house, or trouble him any more. I answered, that I would not; but was sorry to find Mr. Deane was so much deceived in him; and that though he was such a friend to Great-Britain, I declared myself an utter enemy to it, and told him he would soon hear more of my works at Plymouth to convince him of it, and wished him a good night.

Highly disconcerted at this treatment, and vexed at the disappointment of receiving a sum of money, I could not sleep the whole night. In the morning, I got up early, and walked to Hammer-smith, scarcely knowing which road I had taken. I supposed

posed that a discovery would now most likely be made, particularly as Dr. Bencroft expressed himself in favour of government; and knew of my intention to proceed in the same way at Plymouth, as I had just done in the dock at Portsmouth. I went into an ale-house, I believe the sign of the Light Horseman, called for pen, ink, and paper, and wrote to Dr. Bencroft on the occasion, requesting him not to disclose the circumstances I had related to him, as it would greatly injure his friend Mr. Silas Deane, and the cause of America, and do himself no service. Whether this had any weight with him or not, I can't say, but believe he never discovered the transaction to the public.

I began my journey to Plymouth, sometimes walking, and sometimes taking advantage of the stages; but I never rode far at a time, for fear of being taken notice of by the passengers. My first stage was to Oxford, from whence I went to Hungerford, and having no money, applied to one Mr. Smith, a painter, of that place, for employment. I worked for him about ten days, in the mean time having learnt where he kept his money, I broke open his house, and stole four guineas, with which I made my escape to Bristol undiscovered. I staid here two days, in order to acquaint myself with the shipping. I went on
board

board several of them, but at present attempted nothing, my design being against another place; so that after making what observations I could, I set out for Plymouth. When I reached Exeter, I prepared a quantity of combustibles for setting fire to Plymouth dock. I never lodged twice at the same house, but removed from one end of the town to another, to prevent being remembered. I left Exeter the 26th of December; and arrived at Plymouth the 27th. I left my bundle at a house in the outskirts of the town, where I had taken lodgings, and went with a design to visit the dock-yard; but to my great surprise found the guard stricter, and the admission of strangers objected to; occasioned, as I was informed, by the burning of Portsmouth dock, which was supposed to have been purposely set on fire.

I now thought myself in a worse situation than ever. I had observed by the papers, that the damage at Portsmouth had not answered my expectation, owing to the machine in the hemp-house not taking effect; and to be disappointed here, would destroy my plan, as I intended, after succeeding at Plymouth, to have gone immediately to Paris, to consult Mr. Deane, particularly as Dr. Bencroft had declined giving me his assistance, or having any thing to do with it. I consulted

a num-

a number of schemes to effect my purpose; but all were impracticable. I walked several times round the walls, which are every where so high, that I could see no possibility of getting over. I knew perfectly well the very spot where the magazines of pitch, tar, and hemp were situated, and intended, could I scale the walls, to set them on fire. I tried again for admittance into the yard, but could not succeed. I at last thought of a rope ladder, having taken much notice of them at sea. I went into a shop, purchased a quantity of ropes, and carried them to my lodgings, which I still continued to change most nights, sometimes sleeping at Plymouth, and sometimes at Plymouth Dock.

I went to work upon the ropes, and in less than a day completed a very good ladder. My next care was to invent a fastening to hang it on the wall. I applied to a smith, and directed him to make me two hooks very large and strong, each forming an angle, with one side much longer than the other. Having procured these, I fastened one to each side of the top of the ladder, by means of a hole made at the extremity of the stem of the hooks to receive the cord. About one o'clock in the morning of the 29th of December, I made trial of my ladder, which after throwing upon the wall, four or five times, took effect beyond expectation.

pectation. I mounted the wall in an obscure lane, and on looking over I found the coast clear. I turned my ladder, and let myself down into the dock-yard, intending to set it on fire in three different places; but when I had gone within about fifty yards of the hemp-house, I heard some of the centinels in conversation, and not being able to distinguish their words, and imagining I should be seen, I returned, and declined making any further attempt till the next night.

I now flattered myself with the hope of succeeding; and made every necessary preparation for it. I discharged my lodging, and carried my bundle a little way out of town and hid it, intending to set off the instant I had completed the business. I returned into the town, and soon after midnight fixed my ladder, and mounted upon the wall. It was not moon-light, nor so dark but there was a possibility of seeing objects at a little distance. I turned my ladder while I sat upon the wall, but in attempting to go down, the hold gave way, and let me down with some bricks from the top of the wall. I was a little frightened at this misfortune, particularly as I observed a centinel at some little distance, walking

ing backwards and forwards at his stand; who I dare say, had he heard the noise of the fall, and seen me, would have shot me. I therefore walked a little further down, and having fixed my ladder, went back again, thinking I was too much disconcerted at what had happened, to do the business properly that night.

Very much vexed at this disappointment, I walked the streets the remainder of the night, which was exceedingly cold. I had some thoughts of returning immediately to Bristol, with an intent to set fire to the shipping, wherein I saw no difficulty; but the idea of giving up Plymouth was so vexatious, that I determined to make a fresh trial the next night, and to carry my point, though at the hazard of my life. When day light appeared, I went to a little ale-house for refreshment, said I had travelled all night, and desired leave to lay down. I slept most part of the day, being very much fatigued, and in the evening I walked once more round the walls, to fix upon a fresh place for an attempt. Between one and two o'clock in the morning, I proceeded with my ladder to another part of the yard, near the magazine of pitch and tar, intending, to set that on fire first.

I accordingly provided myself with a machine well charged, plenty of fresh tinder, a pistol tinder-box, spirits of turpentine, and other combustibles, together with a pistol loaded with slugs; and I set out with a great resolution of effecting my design that night. Having fixed my ladder, which generally took me about a quarter of an hour, sometimes more, sometimes less, as it depended upon chance. I mounted the wall, and let myself down into the yard, without any noise or difficulty, and proceeded very gently towards the magazine of pitch and tar, which was my first object. I passed several centinels at a little distance; but when I came nearer to the store-house, I saw two centinels walking backwards and forwards by the side of it, so that I could not effect my purpose there. I then went towards the hemp-house, intending to fire that; but here again I was prevented by the vigilance of the watch. I directed my steps very slowly another way, but before I had gone a hundred yards, I thought I heard several voices in earnest conversation, upon which, supposing I was discovered, I ran back again as fast as I could upon my toes, and having gained the ladder, I returned over the wall with
all

all possible haste, and set off immediately for Exeter, expecting to be pursued.

Having gone so far as to think myself out of danger, I determined to make the best of my way to Bristol; and, as I was disappointed at Plymouth, resolved to destroy Bristol entirely, and all the shipping. I made very little delay upon the road, except at Exeter, where I purchased more combustibles of different kinds, as I intended to lay them in a number of streets at the same time. From Exeter I came to Bristol, and stopped at the shop of one Mr. Mason, a painter, of whom I requested leave to grind some charcoal upon his colour-stone. He treated me with great civility, asked me to eat and drink, and after some conversation, told me I was welcome to grind what I pleased. I stayed about three hours, and then proceeded to a remote part of the town to provide myself with lodgings.

I arrived at Bristol on Monday the 13th of January last, and spent the whole of Tuesday the 15th in acquainting myself with the shipping, upon which I intended to make the first attempt, supposing, if I had any success,

they would communicate the flames to the whole town. At night I paraded the town all over, the better to acquaint myself with the different streets, and to find out where I could do the most mischief. The next day, being the 15th, I went to bed intending to be up all the ensuing night to effect my design, having first prepared all things in readiness for the purpose.

About midnight, I proceeded with all my materials, towards the quay. I got on board the *Savannah la Mar*, a Jamaica-man, and placed a quantity of turpentine, rosin, pitch, &c. round the mizen-mast, to which I set fire. I then went on board the *La Fame*, another Jamaica-man, which lay at a little distance, in which I also placed a quantity of combustible matter, and set fire to it. I then proceeded to another part of the quay, and got on board the *Hibernia*, an Irish trader, in which I placed a like quantity of inflammable materials, and a quart bottle of spirits of turpentine, to which I also set fire. I then broke open a warehouse belonging to a druggist, in Cypher-lane, supposing there were large quantities of oils and spirits of different kinds, which would occasion a dreadful fire in
that

that part of the town. I set fire to a box in the middle of the warehouse, which I supposed would soon communicate to all parts of it.

Having, as I thought, effected my business very complete, I walked almost four miles out of town, and stayed till near eight o'clock in the morning; but not perceiving any thing of the fire, I returned to see whether it had taken effect, which I could do without suspicion, as I supposed people would see that I had just come into town. I went to the quay, where I observed one vessel, the *Savannah la Mar*, was much burnt; but the fire in the other two, had gone out without taking effect. I also found I had miscarried in Cypher-lane, where the box of combustible matter burnt out, without doing any damage, which I thought very extraordinary, as I made sure of burning all that part of the town by this means. I was mostly vexed at the miscarriage among the shipping, as I found a strict watch was to be kept up in future, which rendered all further attempts upon them impracticable; I thought of one scheme, however, which I had some hopes of succeeding in. Observing a vast number of barrels of oil upon the quay, situated very near a line of ships,

I contrived, the ensuing night, to convey a large quantity of combustible materials among them, to which I set fire, hoping by this means to burn all the ships that lay near: but herein also I found myself disappointed; my matches went out without effecting the intended mischief, though greatly to my mortification.

I retired to a fresh lodging, to prepare a more copious undertaking, which I determined to put in execution the approaching night. I thought any further attempts upon the ships or quay, would be dangerous, and therefore concluded that the only effectual method I could take to accomplish my business, would be to set the whole town on fire, by placing combustibles in a number of places at once, in all of which I was pretty sure of not mis-carrying.

About two o'clock in the morning, I proceeded to this business, having the evening before fixed upon a number of warehouses, which I supposed, as it was now Sunday morning, would not be frequented, and therefore little danger of the fire being discovered till it had taken proper effect. I laid matches in upwards
of

of a dozen warehouses, which I supposed would take fire before day-light, and from their number and situation be impossible to be got under, so that I promised myself I had accomplished the destruction of the whole town, or at least that part of it which was of most consequence. With this persuasion I left Bristol about six o'clock in the morning, and walked about three miles out of town, when turning round, I thought the whole element was in flames, so dreadful was the appearance it had at that distance, which tempted me to return to be an eye-witness of the destruction I had wrought. On my nearer approach, the flames seemed to abate; but I found the whole city in consternation, and terror; though my scheme had not answered my full intension. My matches had only taken effect in Quay-lane, among the warehouses of Mr. Browne, bookseller, which occasioned a dreadful fire in that part of the town: in every other part I found my endeavours had failed. To compensate for this, I determined to make a fresh attempt on the Sunday night, and made every preparation for that purpose. Between one and two o'clock on Monday morning, I set about this business, but was prevented by the vigilance of the watch raised

raised by the inhabitants of the city, to patrol the streets, which obliged me to decline attempting any thing further that night. I made several fresh attempts the Monday and Tuesday nights following, but the patrol was too vigilant to allow me time to proceed, I therefore left Bristol, finding it impossible to complete my design.

I now determined to make the best of my way to Paris, to acquaint Mr. Deane with my success, and the behaviour of Dr. Bencroft. I was well assured he would reward me in such a manner, as would enable me to return to finish the destruction of the docks, without suffering me to be in want of money, which obliged me to commit robberies, or break open houses, wherever I went. I was at this time short of money, having laid out considerably for combustible materials, and before I could proceed to Paris, it was necessary I should have a fresh supply, to carry me there. I thought of applying once more to Dr. Bencroft for this purpose; but when I recollected his former treatment, I thought it would answer no end. With these thoughts I reached Calne, where observing a haberdasher's shop, kept by one Mr. Lowe, which

which I thought might be easily broke open. I determined to take a quantity of such goods as I could easily sell upon the road. I went backwards and forwards a number of times by the shop door, to take notice of every thing I could; but did not go into the shop. In the night I found means to open the shutters of the parlour window, and having thrown up the sash, I got into the parlour and then into the shop without making the least noise, and stole muslins, and sundry other things to the amount of upwards of twenty pounds, with which I got clear off, and sold them before I reached Odiham.

It was to this little town, that Mr. Lowe, whose shop I had broke open, and Mr. Dalby, keeper of Andover Bridewell, had both traced me. Mr. Lowe had got a description of my person from his wife, who observed me take particular notice of the shop, and concluded, the next day, that I had committed the burglary. Mr. Dalby had heard of my going through Andover, and finding I answered the description of the person advertised in the papers for setting fire to Portsmouth dock, he set out in pursuit of me, and took me at this town,

town, in whose custody Mr. Lowe found me on his arrival shortly after.

I was taken before the Hon. Sir H. P. St. John, Knt. who committed me to Odiham Bridewell, on suspicion of breaking open Mr. Lowe's house; but government having notice of my being in custody, ordered me to the New Prison, Clerkenwell, to be examined before Sir John Fielding, relative to the fire at Portsmouth. Nothing appearing sufficiently strong against me to prove guilt in this particular, I was remanded back to New Prison, in order to be conveyed to Salisbury to take my trial for breaking open Mr. Lowe's house; but my being decoyed into the trap set for me by Mr. Baldwin, to whom I disclosed the whole of my proceedings against government, has brought me to a death which the enormity of my crimes deserve; but which, through sincere repentance, I hope will be forgiven, as I forgive Mr. Baldwin, and all the world.

This is my true confession, in which I have related every thing I can recollect, except a number of crimes of a more petty nature, which
I have

I have committed both now and in my more early life. But I beg forgiveness of all the world, as they would wish to be forgiven of God. And I, for my part, freely forgive all mankind, (none excepted) even as I wish to be myself forgiven.

(Signed,)

JAMES AITKEN.

The above is a true copy of James Aitken's Confession, delivered to me in Winchester Goal, on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, the 7th, 8th, and 9th, of March, 1777.

J. WHITE,

Keeper of the said Goal.

On the morning of his execution, he was conveyed, under a strong guard, to Portsmouth White-house, where he was put into a cart, and taken into the dock yard. He was then drawn round the remains of the rope-house, which was one thousand and eighty feet long, and desired by the public to cast his eyes upon the destruction his mischievous hands had wrought.

wrought. He replied, that he remembered the place perfectly well, and that he was the person who set it on fire; but could now make no reparation, but with his life. He was then ordered to the place of execution; but when he was going by the Commissioner's house, he desired to stop to speak to him. The Commissioner came forward, when the convict addressed him as follows: "I have been guilty of a crime, which has been of some injury to government, but I hope it will make the Commissioners of his majesty's dock yards more careful in future, particularly at Portsmouth and Plymouth, where an active artful man may do a deal of mischief." He was then drawn from the dock yard to the place of execution.

Soon after he got upon the scaffold, he kneeled against the gibbet, and prayed very earnestly for the space of ten minutes. The halter was then put round his neck, with which he advanced to the side of the scaffold, and addressed the spectators, (which were incredibly numerous) to the following effect:

"Good people, I am now going to suffer for
"a crime, the heinousness of which deserves a
"more severe punishment than what is going to
"be

“ be inflicted. My life has been long forfeited
“ by the innumerable felonies I have formerly
“ committed ; but I hope God, in his great
“ mercy, will forgive me ; and I hope the pub-
“ lic, whom I have much injured, will carry their
“ resentment no further, but forgive me, as I
“ freely forgive all the world, and pray for me,
“ that I may have forgiveness above. I have
“ made a faithful confession of every transaction
“ of my life from my infancy to the present time,
“ particularly the malicious intention I had of
“ destroying all the dock yards in this kingdom,
“ which I have delivered to Mr. White, and
“ desired him to have printed, for the satisfac-
“ tion of the public. I die with no enmity in
“ my heart to his majesty and government, but
“ wish the ministry success in all their under-
“ takings ; and I hope my untimely end will be
“ a warning to all persons, not to commit the
“ like atrocious offence.”

Mr. White then addressed the public, said he
had the confession just mentioned, and would
take care to have it printed. That he thanked
them for the great order and decency they had
kept up, and was particularly obliged to Philip
Varlo, Esq; mayor of Portsmouth, for his great
civility and assistance in providing the borough
con-

constables, and attending himself in person. That he was happy in hearing no reflections cast upon the prisoner in his last moments, who was sensible of the enormity of his crime, and going to suffer the law.

The convict then prayed a few minutes longer, when giving the signal, he was drawn up by pulleys to the top of the gibbet, which was made of the mizen mast of the *Arathusa* frigate, and was sixty-four feet and a half high. He hung one hour, and was then taken down, and hung in chains on Block-house-Point, at the mouth of Portsmouth Harbour.

F I N I S.

*This Day was Published, price Six-pence, of a Size to
bind up with the History of his Life,*

The SECOND EDITION, of
The TRIAL of JOHN the PAINTER,

With the Arguments of Council, the Judge's Charge
to the Jury, and Sentence of the Prisoner, taken in
Shert-Hand, and printed at Large.

